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NEWS
FROM YOUR MUSEUM
THE ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

Know your Museum better

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SILK STOCKINGS BECOME A MUSEUM EXHIBIT

The luxury of real silk stockings has gone for the duration and possibly forever. Although silk stockings have gone out of use very recently, they have already taken their place with the styles of the past shown in the Royal Ontario Museum. Of particular interest are some that belonged to Queen Victoria, with her monogram surmounted by a crown worked into the top of each stocking. Examples of more lowly origin show plainly the value of silk stockings during the 19th century, for it was usual at that time to have long cotton tops and the silk extending only a little above the ankle, which was quite as much leg as any lady was expected to show. Women sometimes made their own silk stockings and the Museum has a beautiful pair of wedding stockings of 1852, which are hand knitted in a fine open-work design.

THE ORIGINAL VICTORY GARDEN

The original victory garden was planted by ants, according to entomologists of the Royal Ontario Museum. The leaf-cutting ants of tropical and sub-tropical America specialize in raising fungi. Pieces of leaves are cut and brought to the nest. Here they are shredded and worked into beds in specially ventilated chambers. Fungi sown in these beds grow long tendrils over the leaf mould. The ants treat these tendrils in some unknown manner so that spherical swellings develop at the tip. These swellings contain a viscous liquid on which the entire colony of ants feeds.

Since these insects flourish and much of their success may be attributed to their agricultural achievements, it is quite justifiable to call their fungus beds "victory gardens." Although many animals harvest and store wild crops, man and the leaf-cutting ants are the only creatures which sow as well as reap.

THE EARLIEST TAX SYSTEM

Taxes are older than money. The people of the Nile Valley have been using stamped currency for a mere 2300 years but they have been heavily taxed by their governments for more than 5000 years. In the early days all payments were made in kind—the peasant's taxes were collected in grain and cattle, the craftsman's in the products of his art. Armies of clerks and collectors and thousands of storehouses were necessary for such a system.

In the Egyptian collection of the Royal Ontario Museum there is a 4000 years old painted wooden model showing men driving donkeys with panniers filled with grain. The panniers are inscribed with the hieroglyphs, "King's treasury." The various kinds of goods collected were equated and valued according to a general standard. From the 13th century before Christ until the introduction of currency (4th century B.C.) this standard was a given weight in gold, silver or copper. In this way weights were the precursors of coins. Ancient Egyptian weights, showing the different standards used, are also displayed in the Museum.

ONCE UPON A TIME shoes were eight inches wide across the toe. Shoes of the time of Henry VIII in the Royal Ontario Museum show this style.

FAMOUS FISH of the RESTIGOUCHE

As midsummer approaches, the salmon fishing in northern New Brunswick will be at its height. The Restigouche river, unsurpassed for its scenic grandeur, has been ranked as the world's finest salmon river. By a clever stroke of Nature the reddish-tinted rocks that form the shoreline of the Restigouche estuary contain some of the oldest and most primitive fossil fish known to science. Many examples of these ancient fish may be seen in the Royal Ontario Museum. Strange looking creatures they are,—some, approximately a foot in length, with paddle-like front fins and with armour plates covering the broad head-shield and part of the trunk. They lived 350 million years ago, in an environment similar to that occupied by present-day salmon. Then as now, this was an estuarine area. With the passage of time it has been successively dry land, submerged, dry and flooded again. Now, part of it is once more exposed above the sea. The angler who clambers over the rocks of the Restigouche may well tread on the tomb of the remote ancestors of fish.

RUBIES FOR JULY

There is considerable discord in regard to the natal stone for July. Ruby, however, seems to have won first place. Its warm, bright red colour is certainly suitable for the warmest month of the year.

Enquiring at the Royal Ontario Museum, we learned that rubies are a variety of a common mineral known as corundum. This is a very hard mineral, second only to diamond in that respect. Its more plebeian varieties are used extensively as abrasives. Only the transparent, red stone qualifies as ruby, one of the four gems considered precious at the present time.

Of old, rubies were credited with the power to staunch the flow of blood, to protect the wearer from injury by sword, spear or gun, and to remove evil thoughts. It was also believed that they often became dark and opaque as a warning that some great misfortune was about to befall the wearer.

Whether because of its supposed talismanic virtues or because of its great beauty, the popularity of the ruby has outlasted many centuries. It has everything a precious stone must have—beauty, durability and rarity.

CUCKOO HAS FUR-LINED STOMACH

Familiar objects in the rural landscape these days are the white webs of tent-caterpillars, larvae of two kinds of buff-coloured moths. These larvae inflict considerable injury on the foliage of orchard and forest trees and shrubs. Burning the web and its occupants is an effective means of control. Cuckoos are helpful allies of the horticulturist in destroying this pest, according to ornithologists of the Royal Ontario Museum.

Two native cuckoos, the black-billed and the yellow-billed, habitually feed on tent-caterpillars. Most birds avoid caterpillars armed with bristly hairs but not so the cuckoos. They tear open the tents in plum and cherry thicket and gulp great clusters of the wriggling occupants. Hairs from caterpillars stick into the walls of a cuckoo's stomach imparting to that organ a fur-lined appearance.